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Book P8

LeBaron Brastford Prince

NEW MEXICO.

A DEFENCE OF THE PEOPLE AND COUNTRY

A Reply of Chief Justice Prince to a Slanderous Letter
in the New York Times.

[From the New York Times of Feb. 28, 1882.]

It was only three or four days ago that I saw the *Times* of Feb. 6 containing an anonymous communication dated at Trinidad under the rather inelegant title, "Greasers as Citizens;" and yet I have regretted exceedingly that even that time should, by stress of business, necessarily elapse before I could express the indignation which every one familiar with the facts must have felt at reading the mass of slanders and misrepresentations of which that communication is composed.

I have re-read it several times in order to select the portions which were most untrue for contradiction, but the result has only been to show that the whole is such a string of misrepresentations that it is difficult to particularize any portion as worse than another. The motive which could induce any man thus wantonly to slander and villify over a hundred thousand American citizens seems inexplicable; if not pure malevolence, it must be that strange enjoyment which some persons seem to feel in irresponsible newspaper writing, which they consider spicy and smart in proportion as it is untrue and libelous. This tirade of abuse has for its text the introduction of a bill in Con-

gress to admit New Mexico as a State. On that subject I have nothing to say now—it will no doubt be considered in due time—but I desire to confine this letter exclusively to the slanderous statements from Trinidad as to our people and Territory. The writer thereof, after amiably saying that the admission of New Mexico would be "simply detestable," proceeds in these words:

"Without statistical authority at hand, I think it not far wrong to say that about two-thirds of the population of the Territory is of the mongrel breed known as Mexicans—a mixture of the blood of Apache, negro, Navajo, white horse-thief, Pueblo Indian, and old-time frontiersman with the original Mexican stock."

It is a pity that he did not have the proper "statistical authority at hand," for that might have enlightened him considerably. The United States census, which is probably the best "statistical authority," would have shown the population in 1880 to be as follows, not including the Apaches and Navajos, who are not citizens: Whites, 108,721; colored, (African descent,) 908; Chinese, 36; Pueblo Indians, &c, 9,790. His suggestion of a mixture of "negro" blood in the general population is

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specially unfortunate, as the census of 1870 showed that even at as late a date as that there were but 127 persons of African descent in the whole Territory, counting men, women and children. The increase since then has mostly come from discharged soldiers. While some of the Pueblo villages are quite near Spanish towns, yet no marriage or similar connections take place between the races; they are as separate in such respects as if a Chinese wall ran between. How any Navajo or Apache blood can mix with the Mexican in these days, when these tribes are on reservations far from the centre of population I am at a loss to imagine. The fact is that there is not now and has not been for a long time any such mixture, with very rare exceptions; fully as rare as in other sections of the country where the Caucasian race meets the Indian. Then comes the statement:

"You may sift and rake this Mexican population, and you will scarcely find man, woman or child who does not hate with a passionate hatred everything that is known to him or her as American."

I should not be at all surprised if the Spanish speaking portion of our citizens did "hate with a passionate hatred" the kind of "American" represented by the writer of that article, and I should not think much of their self-respect if they did not. But that there is any such feeling toward Americans as a people is simply untrue. Every American worthy of social recognition who comes here with credentials to show that he is worthy, or with the culture and manners which bespeak the gentleman or lady, will find a welcome both swift and hearty. No more generous hearted, hospitable people can be found on earth than those of New Mexico. Considering the number of adventurers, impostors and swindlers who have imposed on this generosity and hospitality in the past it is almost strange that these noble qualities have not been utterly chilled; but that sad experience has only tended to make the New Mexican, who originally was too credulous and unsuspecting, become circumspect as to the character of his new acquaintances; it has not lessened the warmth of welcome to those who deserve it.

More than two years ago, in writing to a metropolitan newspaper, I said: "The native population are polite, generous, and hospitable almost to a fault, with no dislike or distrust of new com-

ers of the proper class; but inclined to welcome good citizens from wheresoever they come. Those who choose to make New Mexico their home, and who are entitled to respect and confidence, will find a welcome anywhere in the Territory, and need have no fear of being branded as 'carpet baggers.'"

Since then not far from 20,000 new inhabitants have come into the Territory—certainly a sufficient test—and I can emphatically reiterate every word then written. Of course, I do not mean that the Mexicans admire the desperadoes, roughs, bullies and "rustlers," who are apt to be found on the borders of civilization, or the ill-mannered and vulgar, who would abuse them because their mother tongue was Spanish instead of English. I simply mean that a worthy man is as sure of a welcome and recognition here as anywhere in the country, and that no such prejudice exists as your correspondent suggests. It may be added here that the native people of New Mexico had an opportunity once to show their loyalty to American institutions by something more substantial than words, and that their patriotic response in the time of the rebellion was made by furnishing over 6,000 men to the union army, a larger number in proportion to the population than could be boasted of by many of the most loyal states.

It is true that the educational condition of the Territory is not altogether as we could wish. Two centuries of practical isolation naturally had a bad effect in this respect, but this is being rapidly remedied. One quarter of the entire regular taxation is devoted to public schools by law, and there are excellent educational establishments of high grade at Santa Fe, Las Vegas, Taos, Bernalillo, Albuquerque, Socorro, Las Cruces, Mesilla, Silver City, and other points. On this subject, also, your correspondent grossly exaggerates. When he says: "Whole counties might be searched before a man could be found able to give the name of the President of the United States," he simply states what is untrue. I state this unqualifiedly from personal knowledge. The six counties through which I am constantly traveling include those most remote from educational centers and new influences, yet everywhere houses were draped with mourning at the death of General Garfield and the day of his funeral fully observed. I doubt whether in any town of its size in the land that day was as

fully and solemnly observed as in Santa Fe. There are to-day nearly forty newspapers in the Territory, and of these eight or ten are daily. Part are printed in English, part in Spanish, and part in both languages. This surely is not an evidence of dense ignorance. Where is the population of similar numbers anywhere in the east that supports so many newspapers?

Your correspondent next speaks of the political character of the people, and I only refer to this to cite two examples showing how little he really knows of our people, or else how heedlessly he writes. He alludes to a man being a "Democratico" and to the policy of "the Democraticos." Now, perhaps in Colorado they have such people, but in New Mexico they have no such men as "Democratcos." Possibly he intended to speak of "Democratras." Then twice he referred to "whisky" as the great agent of bribery at elections. I had supposed that it was generally known that none of the Latin races were great drinkers. As a matter of fact, it was an unknown article in New Mexico until after the American occupation, and never has become generally popular among the people. The native wine which they usually do drink is far less dangerous beverage.

This brings me to a part of the communication to which I cannot allude without a blush that it was written by a fellow countryman—that in which he virtually proclaims that the entire female native population of New Mexico are devoid of morality, and set a money price upon their virtue. In his own words:

"It is a patent, notorious fact, blazoning itself forward with startling boldness, that in no other part of Christendom are the women of an entire community so generally without a sense of the beauties of virtue and so ready to prove their insensibility for a money consideration."

That any man born of woman, and perchance with sisters and daughters whom he respects, should make such a wholesale denunciation, is beyond comprehension. Either he wilfully and wickedly says what he knows is untrue, or else he equally wickedly slanders his neighbors without knowledge. If he has never been in New Mexico, he has no right to speak. If he has been here I can only express pity that he should have had no opportunity to associate with any class except those whom he describes. That there may be women here as elsewhere, who have lost self-

respect and fallen from virtue, is no doubt true; and in a country where large bodies of soldiers have been stationed for years, where the foreign element until recently did not have permanent homes and families and where the population as a rule is poor, there may have been more looseness of this kind than in the settled communities of the east. But the statement of your correspondent, as relating to the population in general, is a slander so vile, atrocious, and abominable, that words cannot fitly characterize it. The man who would thus wantonly brand with infamy the wives, daughters and sisters of a whole people is unfit for decent society or the credence of respectable men.

No more high-bred, noble, and pure-minded women are to be seen on earth than among the Spaniards of New Mexico. They are brought up with a care similar to that seen in Europe, and which seems almost too strict to us who are accustomed to the freedom of girl life in general in the United States.

From this difference in education they are more modest and less self-asserting than most American girls; but the system produces good daughters faithful wives and noble matrons. Any one whose character gives him entrance to the society of the respectable classes will find this true, both in town and country, in the plaza and on the ranch. The virtue of our countrywomen is too sacred a thing to be flippantly slandered, wholesale, by any writer, and least of all by one who is nameless.

No people have been more misunderstood in the remainder of the country than the natives of New Mexico. They have been judged by the few rough characters first met upon the border, and from exaggerated accounts of the feats of some wild desperado, until the opinion became prevalent that they were a set of "bold, bad men," lawless, violent, and regardless of life! But how would we English-speaking Americans like to be judged by the rough and reckless men of the border or the desperadoes who have been forced by law from settled communities and live on murder and plunder? As a matter of fact, the Mexican population is quiet, orderly, and law-abiding. No people, probably, similarly situated is so much so. The crimes of violence in this Territory are nearly all committed by the lawless set of men who followed the advance of the railroad into New Mexico, and have now, fortunately, mostly moved on or been

killed off. To use the words of the Governor of the Territory in a recent report to the Secretary of the Interior:

"The people of the Territory have frequently given substantial evidence that they are a well-disposed, patriotic, and liberty loving people. The native population are seldom guilty of heinous crimes. Most of the desperadoes who have recently infested the Territory, and those still at large within her borders, are adventurers from other localities."

Those who have opportunities of meeting socially the better classes of the people will all concur that a more courteous, hospitable, and chivalric social element does not exist in the land. They are fit representatives of the land of the Cid, and successors of the historic discoverers and conquerors of the soil. It is not necessary to come to New Mexico to know this. The *Times* must have thousands of readers who, within the last five years, have met the representatives of the Territory in Washington—Messrs. Trinidad Romero, Mariano S. Otero, and Tranquilino Luna—and who know from them what a New Mexican gentleman is. So much for the population so maligned by your correspondent. Let me add a word of the Territory and its prospects, which are also unfairly represented by him.

Within the past three years about 20,000 new citizens have come to New Mexico. They constitute a valuable and welcome population. The rougher set who came with the railroad have,

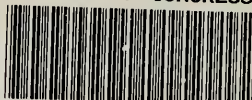
fortunately, passed on. These 20,000 are men of energy and enterprise, equal in working ability to 50,000 who stay where they are born. No other part of the country has had the railroad development that New Mexico has received since 1879. No State or Territory can show such rapid and substantial growth in its towns as are found at Las Vegas, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Socorro, Raton, and a dozen other places. And, to put a great deal in a few words, there is no State or Territory in the whole country, except California, which possesses the variety of natural resources with which New Mexico is blessed. It has gold and silver in abundance, but it does not have to depend on its product of precious metals as do Colorado and Nevada. Its beds of coal alone would make it a great State; it has the only anthracite in the Southwest, and bituminous is found in all sections. The rich valleys of the Pecos, Rio Grande, Canadian and San Juan present a fine field for agriculture. Its vast prairies are the home of immense herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. It possesses the finest fruit belt of the Southwest, and has for a market the whole country between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains. Altogether, its future is promising beyond compare. It is in no hurry to be a State, but its progress will necessarily make it in a short time a great and important one.

L. BRADFORD PRINCE.

SANTA FE, February, 20, 1882.



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